Ahoy Mateys! Targeting Pirates with SEO [Case Study]

By Christian Bullock on May 18, 2015

The Set-Up

Our client - Parallels (http://www.parallels.com/) - has a piracy issue.

The Problem

There are approximately **17,670 global searches a month** for Parallels' popular desktop virtualization software Parallels Desktop for Mac (http://www.parallels.com/products/desktop/).

Fairly big number, right?

What I didn't mention was any context for this number.

There are **17,670 global searches a month** for their desktop virtualization software <u>with modifiers such as</u> keygen, crack, license code, serial code and other ways people are searching to pirate their software.

You'd have thought "Parallels key generator" was a product feature by the amount of searches that are happening around that keyword category!

In a broad sense, there are over 2.5 million searches a month for Parallels and their virtualization and mac management solutions...

But we wanted to **focus on this 17k+ number**.

These 17k+ searches were search engine result pages that only displayed listings on ways to illegally obtain full, retail versions of their software.

This is a problem because as their online marketing partner, our objective is to earn them the most revenue possible :D

This is how we sold this idea to our client; it's a direct copy / paste from the creative POV document we sent:

- This concept is to generate revenue from an area where revenue is lost and to have a conversation with those who already know about Parallels and want to use it.
- It would be a self-contained idea that would run itself.
- It would have no end date. It could run forever.
- A forward-thinking, fresh & original idea – somewhat rare for a company to acknowledge piracy & to creatively try to curb it.
- Would get some buzz on tech sites/blogs.

The Idea

What if we could create something that could outrank torrent websites and other "competitors" posting keygens and cracks for Parallels software?

Essentially: how could we concoct something to combat pirates and get a Parallels page to rank above them?

Enter: **The KeyGenie**!

Located at http://www.parallels.com/keygenie (http://www.parallels.com/keygenie), this was the ammo we used to outrank keygen websites and to get those searching for illegal means to obtain Parallels to instead find this resource.

The idea is based off of The Akinator (http://en.akinator.com/), a self-proclaimed "Web Genius" resource that was launched in 2007 and grew to be famous in some European countries and then grew to have some notoriety in the US around 2010.

In fact, the Akinator has *over 1 million likes on Facebook* and has 10,000+ rounds *played every day*.

If you're not familiar: Think 20 questions but with some weird Internet genie. It's actually pretty fun.

Couple of wrinkles in how KeyGenie is different:

- Educates the player in why buying a legal copy of Parallels would be desirable. This includes support options, the ability to upgrade for a lower price and gives the user a direct link to click to go download a free 14 day trial
- The KeyGenie WILL actually hand out keys! Programmed randomly, the KeyGenie is loaded to gift a select amount of actual Parallels Desktop for Mac keys to players.

Design Process

Our design team went to work on what our "KeyGenie" would look and animate like. Some early-stage ideas we had are below:

[caption id="attachment_5487" align="alignnone" width="300"] (/img/blog-posts/2015/05/TropicalGenie.jpg) *The Tropical KeyGenie*[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_5488" align="alignnone" width="300"] (/img/blog-posts/2015/05/HipsterGenie.jpg) *The Hipster KeyGenie*[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_5489" align="alignnone" width="300"] (/img/blog-posts/2015/05/CartoonGenie.jpg) *Saturday Cartoon KeyGenie*[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_5490" align="alignnone" width="300"] (/img/blog-posts/2015/05/RobotGenie.jpg) *The Robot KeyGenie*[/caption]

After we went through our initial round of feedback, we went with the Robot KeyGenie.

It was important that the robot had some "life" - like The Akinator - so we worked with our design team to get some robot emotions in place.

[caption id="attachment_5491" align="alignnone" width="300"] (/img/blog-posts/2015/05/RobotGenieDUMBFOUNDED.png) His dumbfounded expression.[/caption]

[caption id="attachment_5492" align="alignnone" width="300"] (/img/blog-posts/2015/05/RobotGenieMEDITATING.png) In a meditating state.[/caption]

After client approvals, we pieced everything together. *Phew!* KeyGenie was now in place.

Launch and Tactics Deployed

We launched KeyGenie in October 2014.

We ensured that on-page SEO recommendations were in place with our keyword ranking target being "Parallels keygen."

We knew social signals were an essential way to quickly get indexed and get some page authority in place, so we set up KeyGenie's Google+ (https://plus.google.com/108456042082018946387/posts) and Twitter (https://twitter.com/thekeygenie) profiles.

We added the URL to our client's XML sitemap file and pinged search engines to grab the fresh file.

We obtained a nice initial and fairly authoritative link at the get-go, with SEO Wilderness checking out (http://searchwilderness.com/parallels-piracy-seo/) the resource and calling it *"a pretty cool idea."*

We did some outreach, built some more links, and then waited.

Results

If you go to Google and search for "Parallels keygen," you'll be greeted with results that look like this:

(/img/blog-posts/2015/05/Keygenie-Ranking.png)

We achieved our ranking goal! Look at all of those "parasite" sites that were previously competing for the #1 spot.

Guess who has it now? :D

And traffic has been slowly building as well (*mind you, this is all organic search*):

(/img/blog-posts/2015/05/keygenie-traffic.png)

So we achieved our ranking goal and seeing traffic increase m/m. Now: how about trials and revenue?

So far, **we've generated dozens of trials and 4-figures in revenue from KeyGenie. And the numbers will keep on growing.**

Again, keep in mind that *people searching for how to obtain Parallels illegally for free* will never stop. Fortunately, we have this "weapon" in place now to help combat that.

The only way people will stop searching for Parallels +keygen, +serial +crack, etc. is if they start searching for Parallels +keygenie :D

What We Learned

Well first of all:

(/img/blog-posts/2015/05/anything-is-possible.gif)

(If you don't know the above, check out the video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wcz_kDCBTBk))

No but seriously: this is a prime example of thinking outside the box.

Our thinking was, *"How can we expand our audience to get more revenue in the door?"*

The **obvious answers** are competitive messaging & comparisons or targeting first-time desktop virtualization buyers.

Again, **obvious answers**.

But MKG Marketing isn't about obvious answers.

The key point here from our initial thinking to now analyzing some initial returns is:

Think *unobviously*.

The Parallels KeyGenie was one of the ~97,920,000 web pages that went live on the Internet when we launched back in October. The KeyGenie now ranks #1 for our target search query - none of the other 97 million pages have done that.

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3014 Dauphine St.
Suite P
New Orleans, LA 70117
Email: mike@mkgmarketinginc.com
Phone: +1 504 355 1436

914 164th St SE B12
#194
Mill Creek, WA 98012

2005 SE 192nd Ave.
Suite #200
Camas, WA 98607

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